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A noisy week in our hometown

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It was not a quiet week in our hometown. We're not complaining about that. The arenas were full and the streets were busy. There were speeches and slogans and hot talk on the air and, from time to time, flash-bangs and pepper spray. The hills were alive with the sound of democracy's music, hard harmony and all.

There's a lot to sort out, now that two years of planning and the planned event are past. Before we get all caught up in that, let's say this, without equivocation: St. Paul, Minneapolis and their partners did a great job hosting the 2008 Republican National Convention. This was a huge event, planned painstakingly and executed well.

We congratulate all involved, and thank them for representing our region with grace and good cheer.

St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman and his team were cool under fire, responsible for extending hospitality across the partisan aisle while dealing with intense reaction, some of it out of all proportion, to the city's efforts to keep order during the convention.

We realize there is a difference of opinion on this. We certainly didn't see everything, but judging from what we did see, local officers of the law showed admirable restraint as they dealt with groups of people whose intentions weren't always clear, or were all too clear. The vast majority of protesters throughout the week, passionate as they were, were

civil, responsible and respectful of others' rights and property. They should not be blamed for the few window-breaking, cop-assaulting, mask-wearing nitwits whose democratic vocabulary is so limited they have to speak with violence.

Now, as to the sorting out — it's going to take a while, and it's going to take the instruments of civil society as well as a commitment to transparency from the political and civic bosses who brought the convention here.

What we got for our trouble matters — was the convention good for business? Does it help the region compete for more business in the future? Did it bring in more than it cost? And so on.

And how we did with our trouble matters, too, perhaps more, in the long run — did we balance liberty and security well? At every step, including intelligence-gathering and pre-emption, did we protect civil liberties? In each instance, was the amount of force applied justified and appropriate?

Fortunately, the record of what went on here in the past week will be extensive. There's video of people taking video of people taking video of people taking video. So as each arrest is examined and each charge adjudicated, it will be possible to get a reasonably clear sense of which were right and which was wrong — how our police on the front lines did. We predict the record will show they mostly did very well.

The spookier questions have to do not with local, front-line officers, whose public behavior is well-documented and whose accountability is local, but with undercover investigations, behind-the-scenes decision-making and federal involvement. In an era of Homeland Security and the Patriot Act, it's difficult to discern the limits of federal power, and to check it.

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So there's a lot of sorting out to do. In the meantime, we're cheering the good faith and good work of thousands of upstanding, patriotic Americans, all across the political spectrum, insiders and outsiders, who made it a noisy week in our hometown.

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